


Memorandum

To: Interested Parties
From: Jonathan Schechter 
Date: January 30, 2013
Re: My big picture take-aways from this year's "22 in 21"



Along with this memo, I have prepared three other documents examining 2013's "22 in 21" (all three are attached):

- a list of things to reprise and change for next year's events;
- a "Chance Meetings Primer" to help those interested in setting up similar events;
- a summary of attendees' evaluations;

This memo builds on the other three by offering my summary observations of this year's event, filtered through other thinking I've done about the region's future.

As a community, we are clearly in transition. It's clear where we've been – we're leaving behind four to five decades of relying on tourism and construction/real estate for our economic growth and well-being. What's not clear is where we are headed. Nor are we clear about the degree to which we can shape this uncertain future. At 22 in 21, these uncertainties formed a sub-text for the day, informing nearly every speaker's remarks, and stimulating the workgroups' discussions and suggestions.

Another sub-text was uncertainty about whether, in this period of change, we can continue to rely on the institutions, traditions, and processes which brought us to this point. For example, re-instating the lodging tax and the interest in establishing a Convention and Visitors Board are among the tourism industry's reactions to stagnating visitor growth, falling lodging revenues, and ever-increasing competition for tourists. Similarly, public institutions such as the school district, hospital, and local government are recognizing that, in an increasingly connected world, they need to re-examine their core assumptions, ranging from who lives here and why, to the types of services such people require, to who might provide those services.

While there are no clear – or even murky – answers to these uncertainties, what is starting to become clear is a method for responding to them: collaboration. Many speakers discussed how their organizations are increasingly seeing collaboration as the key to accomplishing their goals. From an outcomes perspective, the most striking example of this emphasis on collaboration was Table 14, whose 2012 successes rested in large measure on its ability to create "weak ties" among individuals and organizations which otherwise lacked a structure for connecting with one another.

Yet Table 14's success is an exception, for neither Jackson Hole nor most other communities have experience with, nor a formula for, systematically creating collaboration.

Table 14's success also highlights another critical opportunity for the community, one highlighted by the final workgroups. As even a blind man can see, residents share a deep passion for their region and community, and can bring tremendous resources to bear on any challenge or opportunity they face. What's been missing, however, has been a method for systematically harnessing and applying that passion and those resources. Table 14's five step approach of thoughtfully-yet-quickly planning, acting, evaluating, adjusting, and acting again offers an appealing model for other groups considering their own sets of challenges and opportunities. Hence the number of affinity groups suggesting they'll create a similar "Chance Meetings" process for their respective areas of interest.

2012's 22 in 21 launched one very successful effort: Table 14. If 2013's 22 in 21 can build on this by launching two or three similar efforts, the community will have a strong foundational tool for increasing collaboration. In practice, this process will likely be herky-jerky, for there is no clear road map for how to make collaboration work. That noted, the bottom-up, low-risk, give-it-a-try approach spawned by 22 in 21 neatly complements the "how do we work together?" challenge implicitly identified by so many speakers. Embracing this potential is Jackson Hole's great opportunity for 2013.

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